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SUBJECT: DARFUR ELECTION COALITIONS EMERGE FROM SKEPTICISM

REF: A) KHARTOUM 697

B) KHARTOUM 748

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Following the widely criticized census exercise, Darfuris remain wary of the prospects for elections mandated for next year. In a series of meetings, North Darfur political leaders told FieldOff that Darfur political parties are generally ill-prepared to participate, and most remain skeptical that current conditions in Darfur can produce free and fair election results. In the most likely scenario, a coalition led by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) will challenge a coalition headed by the National Congress Party (NCP). Considering the NCP's advantageous position as the current ruling party, such a confrontation is unlikely to be seen as conducted freely or fairly. Political party training, with a focus on constituent mobilization, and the presence of international monitors throughout the process, including during voter registration, could help to level the playing field, and limit violent reactions to perceived electoral injustices.

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Political Parties Ill-Prepared  
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¶2. (SBU) The Darfur offices of the People's Congress Party, (PCP), the Communist Party (CP), the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Sudanese Liberation Movement/Minni Minawi faction (SLM/MM) all claim to have solid support in Darfur, although representatives were hesitant to estimate membership numbers. Although the structures of the parties are both well defined and well known, none has developed or seemingly even thought about a strategy to mobilize supporters for election activities. SLM/MM political representatives complained to FieldOff that "funds to develop political activities are diverted to the military wing due to the non-implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA)." A prominent PCP representative claimed that many of his party's supporters are government workers who cannot be politically active for fear of losing their positions.

¶3. (SBU) The PCP rep pointed to the census and its "obvious irregularities" as a preview of what will happen if elections take place under GoS control. Leaders from Zam Zam camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) agreed, noting that no enumerators visited their camp during the census, although the population was recorded as 69,000 individuals after the last verification. (NOTE: Although UNFPA previously told FieldOffs that the Central Bureau of Statistics had trained enumerators from IDP camps to enumerate those camps, Zam Zam IDP leaders said that this had not occurred in their camp (ref A). They were not adamant about participating or not participating in the census, rather it appeared to happen by default as no one came to count them. They did not speculate as to why enumerators did not enter the camp, but UNAMID and other sources told FieldOffs that enumerators had been intimidated and threatened in the areas around other camps, which may explain their hesitancy

to approach Zam Zam (ref B) "Such an undercount lays the groundwork for government manipulation of election results - how would anyone know how many voters to expect if we don't know how many people were meant to vote in the first place?" the PCP rep mused. He was skeptical about PCP participation in the elections, although he admitted that such a decision had not yet been made by the central party leadership.

14. (SBU) SPLM reps, who are anxious to see elections go forward as planned, acknowledged that the census was flawed, noting that their party would likely reject the census results. They would instead call on the GoS to use the 1993 census results plus estimated population growth as the basis for the elections, in an attempt to compensate for any census undercounts in Darfur. SLM/MM reps rejected this solution, claiming that elections were only possible in an environment where there is security and freedom of movement, two conditions that currently do not exist in Darfur. However they conceded that SLM/MM would not make a final decision on electoral participation until after the elections law is passed and the final regulations, including those determining whether women will compete on a separate list, whether the proportional vote will take place at the national or state level and the percentages of the mixed system, and adequately addressing issues of borders and geographical distribution, are all made clear.

15. (SBU) Communist Party reps stressed that elections should be postponed in Darfur until there is an environment of comprehensive peace similar to that found in South Sudan, including the return of IDPs. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is considered a "holy document" by the National Congress Party (NCP) and SPLM, they claimed, with no thought or concern for the negative consequences of the agreement on Darfur or East Sudan, or the continued economic and political marginalization of those regions. "Why should Darfur

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suffer so that the CPA can survive?" they asked. The Communist Party does not want to undermine the CPA, representatives assured FieldOff, but also doesn't want to see increased instability and insecurity in Darfur because of it either.

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Coalition for a "New Sudan"  
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16. (SBU) Although many in Darfur do not want to see elections take place given the current instability, the political parties did agree on the need to form a coalition to oppose the NCP should the elections move forward. Such a coalition would likely be led by the SPLM, which has the most at stake in the elections. SPLM reps said that the party would work with the factions, most notably the SLM/MM and SLA Abdul Wahid factions (SLA/AW), to form a coalition of parties that share the vision of a "New Sudan." They said that any party which embraces democracy and freedom will be welcome, and that that party leaders have already discussed a coalition with Abdul Wahid in Paris and Minni Minawi at the SPLM conference in Juba in May 2008. Government of South Sudan President and SPLM Chairman Salva Kiir Mayardit has agreed to visit Darfur once a preliminary agreement has been reached, they claimed

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Home Court Advantage for NCP  
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17. (SBU) North Darfur political leaders were well aware that challenging the ruling NCP will not be easy. After the recent JEM attack on Omdurman, the NCP has been working to shore up support, they claimed, recruiting Sadiq Al-Mahdi's Umma Party and the Democratic Union Party (DUP) into their ranks in the process. (Note: Darfur Umma and DUP representatives declined to meet with FieldOff. End note) "All of the resources that were supposed to be committed to implementation of the DPA are instead going to NCP's new partners!" a disgusted SLM/MM representative lamented. He cited the recent activities of the North Darfur Wali, who, he claimed, has been quietly dividing existing localities within the state in order to split opposition constituencies and tribes. SLM/MM has been given control of two of the seven localities. The new localities

are being parceled out to NCP loyalists and supporters, increasing GoS control over local activities and diluting SLM/MM's strength in the state. UNAMID's Civil Affairs chief confirmed this, noting that the number of localities in North Darfur has increased from seven to 14 to 22 over the past year, all carefully managed by NCP partisans.

This is all part of a GoS strategy to create conditions for an electoral win, fairly or unfairly, she said. "The NCP is the only party ready for elections, and that's because it has been actively preparing for them since the CPA was signed!" she stated.

¶8. (SBU) Political leaders expressed concern about the NCP's near monopoly of the key components of a successful political campaign - funding and access. SPLM reps insisted that the budget for the election must come from the GoS, with equal funding for all parties, although they acknowledged that is unlikely to occur. They also said that SPLM would call on the GoS to provide equal access to media for all parties. SLM/MM agreed, asking "how can we get our message out to the people if the government won't cover our events?"

Zam Zam IDP leaders were concerned about polling station locations, noting that they are unsure how IDPs could participate in the election if there are no polling stations in or near the camps.

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Comment  
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¶9. (SBU) Although the majority of political leaders in North Darfur do not want elections to occur next year, most have at least considered the possibility and are ready to join a coalition against the ruling NCP. SPLM, as the most well-organized and best funded, will lead the charge, with NCP, Umma and DUP likely squaring off against it. The North Darfur PCP representative hinted that his party has reached out to the government, but would align with whichever side appears the strongest ahead of elections, provided an agreement or suitable guarantee could be made regarding PCP representation in a future government cabinet.

¶10. (SBU) North Darfur political leaders raised valid concerns about next year's elections. Access to adequate funding, media resources and even the location of polling stations will largely determine the outcome of the elections, but even more important, the degree of confidence in the outcome. Neither the NCP nor the SPLM will want to accept defeat, and accusations of election rigging or irregularities could spark fresh violence in Darfur, and even jeopardize the CPA. To ensure fairness and transparency throughout

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the process, all election activities, from adoption of the electoral law to the final certification of the count, must be monitored by neutral, international observers or independent NGOs. In addition, political party training with a focus on constituent mobilization could help to level the playing field, and to limit violent reactions to perceived electoral injustices.

POWERS